

Box Elder Creek Addition to the Amelia Island Wildlife Management Area



Region 7
June 2020



WILDLIFE HABITAT LAND PROJECT PROPOSAL

(vers. 4/2020)

1. **Region:** 7 **Regional Supervisor:** Brad Schmitz
Name of Applicant(s): Steve Atwood
2. **Date:** 6/2/2020
3. **Project Name:** Box Elder Creek Addition to Amelia Island WMA
Type of Project: Fee Title
4. **Size:** Approximately 155 acres of private ownership
5. **Location:** One mile north of Hysham, Treasure County, Region 7
6. **Map(s):**
Figure 1: 1:750K map of general location of proposed WMA addition.

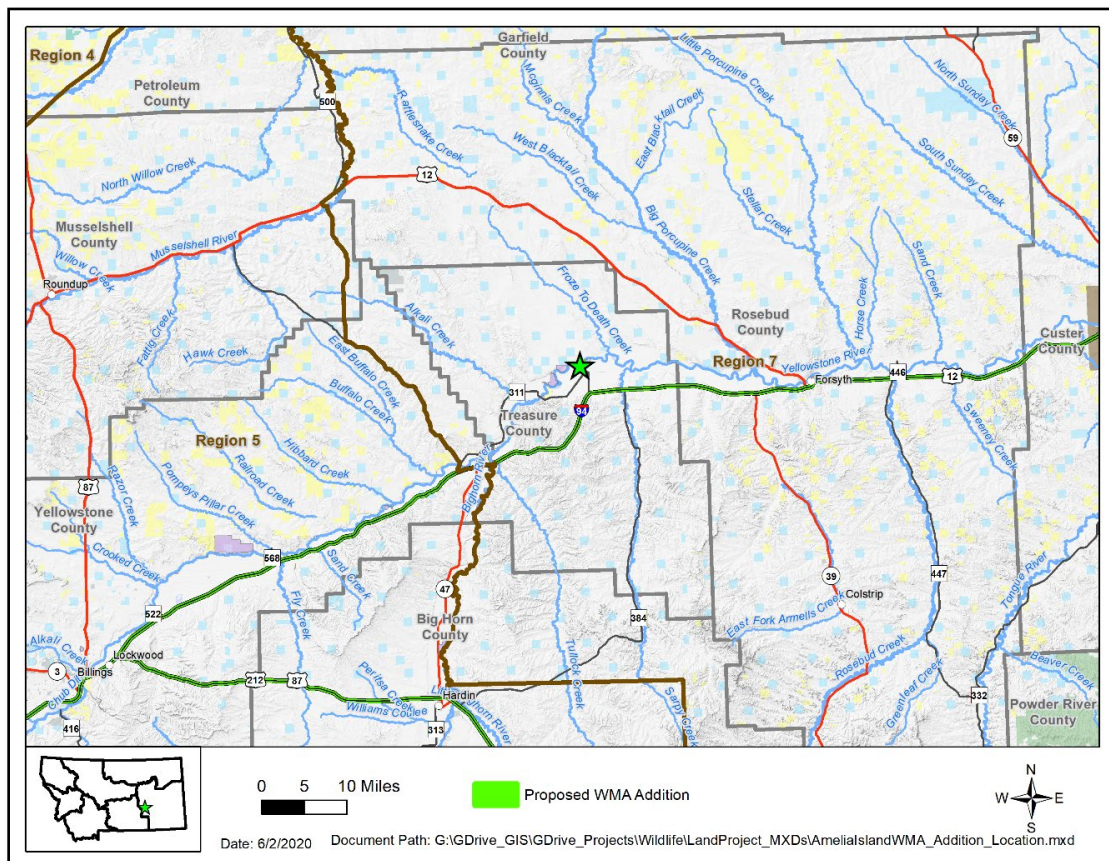


Figure 2: 1:60K map of affected lands of proposed WMA addition.

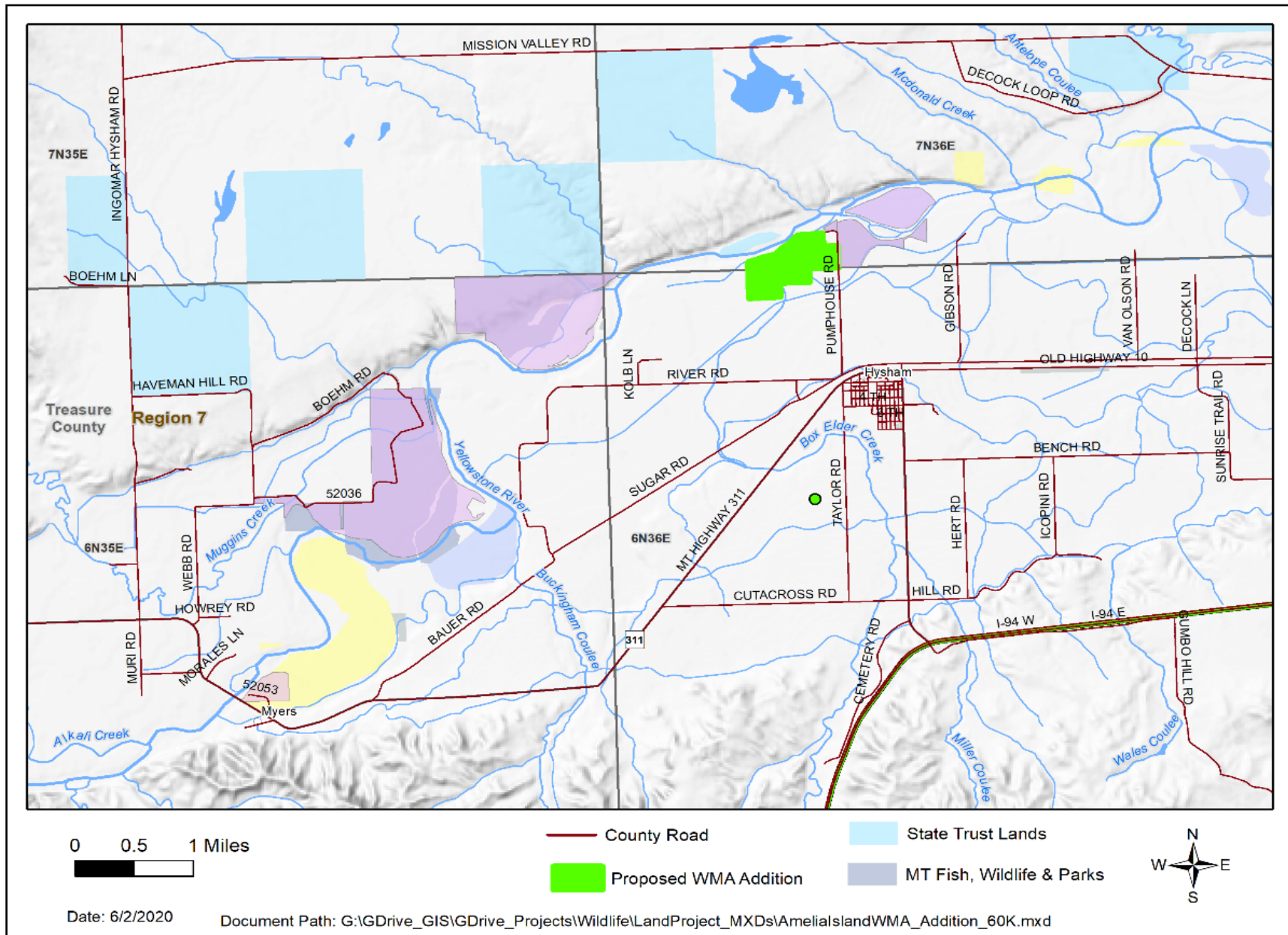
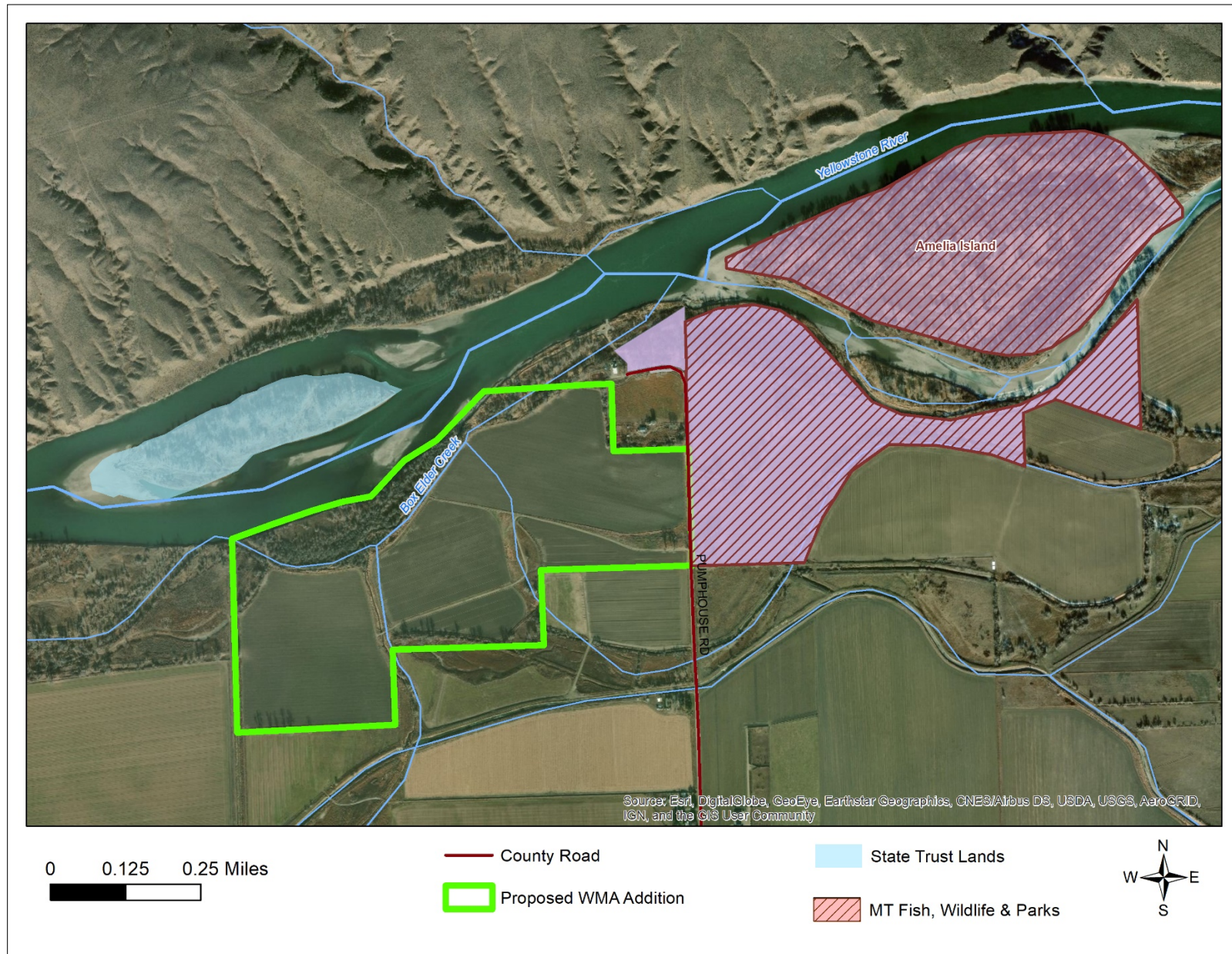


Figure 3: 1:00K aerial image of proposed WMA addition.



7. Project Need (Limit to 1,500 characters) – up to 10 pts. The property is adjacent to the Amelia Island Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and Fishing Access Site and would also be a valuable addition to the existing WMA by increasing the area available to users. Completion of this project would help increase FWP's conservation footprint and facilitate partnership opportunities with surrounding private landowners. The land and all it supports, people of the state of Montana, recreationists and local communities would benefit from this project. Big game species, upland game birds and a variety of non-game species would benefit from the protection and enhancement of habitat on this property.

8. Statewide Habitat Criteria – up to 10 pts. Most of the riparian area along the Yellowstone River Valley has been converted to cropland. The purchase of this property would preserve riparian habitat as well as provide an opportunity to allow natural river processes (e.g. flooding) to occur and reclaim some of the cropland and thereby reestablish riparian vegetation such as cottonwood galleries and willows.

Of the total 155 acres, 40 acres (26%) are riparian/floodplain which is a SWAP 2015 Tier 1 Community Type. This ratio of riparian to cropland is typical of properties along the Yellowstone River and has a similar percentage of Tier 1 Community Type as the Amelia Island WMA. There are 6 acres of accreted ground between the property, Amelia Island WMA and the river. If the accreted acres are included, the property would be approximately 30% Tier 1 Community Type.

9. Project-Level Strategic Criteria

a) Site-Specific Habitat Values – up to 10 pts.

The project would accomplish several strategies listed in the FWP's Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy to:

- Work with private landowners to protect critical habitats.
- Develop incentives for private landowners to protect natural habitat\
- Develop long term riparian and wildlife best management practices while sustaining recreational resources.
- Work toward protection and enhancement of riparian areas.

The riparian area provides habitat for species of greatest conservation need such as bald eagle, black-billed cuckoo, red-headed woodpecker, great blue heron, hoary bat and spiny softshell.

b) Threat Status:

POSSIBLE- 2 pts: This is an opportunity to purchase a piece of property along the Yellowstone River and broaden the conservation and management of critical wildlife habitat. The landowner has listed the property on the market. It is likely a new property owner will purchase the property for recreational purposes due to associated wildlife habitat and recreational values. While threat to the conservation values of the property is possible, loss of public access is imminent.

c) Focal Priority – up to 10 pts.

- Does the proposal occur within a 2015 SWAP Regional Focus Area? (4 pts): Yes, Yellowstone River
- Is this proposal part of an ongoing multi-partner initiative? (3 pts): No
- Does the proposal comprise substantial grasslands within an FWP Grassland Initiative priority county? (3 pts): No
- Is the proposal within an identified priority area in a species or multi-species conservation plan? (3 pts): No
- Does the proposal support an identified connectivity area/corridor? (3 pts): No

d) Geographic Effectiveness – up to 10 pts.

The property is one parcel adjacent to the Amelia Island WMA and would increase the WMA from 200 to 355 acres. The addition would be one mile downstream from Isaac Homestead WMA as well as directly across from a 31-acre MT DNRC island in which FWP holds the recreational use permit. Therefore, the addition, would add to FWP's efforts to maintain and enhance conservation and recreational values in this stretch of Yellowstone River Valley.

e) Contribute to hunting and fishing opportunity and other recreation – up to 10 pts.

The property is accessible via the county road leading to the existing Amelia Island WMA and FAS as well as the Yellowstone River. The addition would be expected to increase annual recreational use days on the existing WMA. Huntatable populations of white-tailed deer, pheasants and Canada geese utilize the property. The Hysham area is well known for waterfowl hunting opportunities and the property is in a high traffic area for waterfowl that roost and loaf on the river. Although the river itself is closed to waterfowl hunting by Fish and Wildlife Commission action, there is a high potential for quality waterfowl hunting opportunities outside of the river's high-water mark.

The property was enrolled in the Block Management Program in 2019. Functioning as a Type 1 Block Management area (sign-in box), the property produced 261 hunter days which supports the amount of opportunity on this relatively small property.

The acquisition of this property would also provide an access point to the Yellowstone for fishing and other recreational activities include floating, bird watching, photography, and foraging for mushrooms and asparagus. There is high angling interest in the area for species such as sauger, walleye, small mouth bass and catfish.

f) Management Considerations – 10 pts.

The addition is adjacent to an existing FWP land interest. Therefore, additional obligations are anticipated to be minimal and staffing needs will not be greatly increased above what is already being expended to manage the Amelia Island WMA and FAS. Small tasks such as installing a new WMA entrance sign and posting boundary signs to include the addition would be required.

The proposed acquisition includes 115 acres of irrigated cropland with associated water rights. The irrigated acres are currently used to produce annual crops such as corn, sugar beets and wheat. As a result, the cropland is clean and free of weeds. It is anticipated that these 115 acres would be integrated into the current Amelia Island management plan where a share-crop agreement has been established with a local farmer. This agreement allows FWP to utilize the knowledge and equipment of a multi-generational farmer to grow diversity of habitat plots for the benefit of game and nongame wildlife (with emphasis on white-tailed deer and pheasants). As with current WMA management practices, it is likely that a rational portion (~30%) of the irrigated acres would be in perennial grass/forb mix.

There are no buildings on the property that would need to be maintained or removed.